

PUGET SOUND PARTNERSHIP STUDY

PROPOSED SCOPE AND OBJECTIVES

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STATE OF WASHINGTON
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Why a JLARC Study of the Puget Sound Partnership?

In 2007, the Legislature created the Puget Sound Partnership, a new state agency charged with coordinating and leading the effort to restore the Puget Sound by 2020. The enabling legislation, Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 5372, directs JLARC to conduct two performance audits of the Partnership, with the first due in 2011 and the second in 2016. In anticipation of these audits, JLARC issued a briefing report in June 2009 that provides background information on the Partnership, describes other states' experiences with large-scale ecosystem-based recovery efforts, and surveyed the agency about its transition from planning to oversight and accountability.

What are the Partnership's Key Responsibilities?

The agency's primary responsibilities can be characterized as three interrelated tasks:

- (1) Developing and prioritizing solutions to restore the environmental health of the Puget Sound by 2020;
- (2) Overseeing the implementation of those solutions; and
- (3) Tracking and monitoring results, and adjusting proposed solutions accordingly.

Key among the Partnership's responsibilities in developing solutions to restore the Puget Sound is delivering an Action Agenda—a science-based plan to set goals and identify near-term actions, strategies, and the entities responsible for cleaning up Puget Sound. The Partnership issued its initial Action Agenda in December 2008, with a revised draft issued in May 2009.

The Partnership is charged with the oversight of the implementation of the Action Agenda. However, the Partnership is not responsible for implementing the Action Agenda itself, nor does it have regulatory or enforcement authority. Instead, various federal, state, local, and tribal partners are responsible for implementing recovery efforts. The Legislature recognized this by prohibiting state agencies' activities from conflicting with the Action Agenda. In some instances the Legislature took a second step and directed state agencies to give preference to those projects implementing the Partnership's solutions when allocating funds through various grant and loan programs.

The Legislature established six goals and eight objectives for the Action Agenda to achieve. The third of the Partnership's key responsibilities is to track and monitor Action Agenda implementation and the results on the environmental health of the Puget Sound. The Partnership is charged with establishing measurable outcomes for each goal and objective, describing what will be achieved, how it will be quantified, and how progress will be measured. The Legislature directs the use of adaptive management—an ongoing evaluation and feedback process to learn from what does and does not work in a complex,

ecosystem wide restoration project. The legislation directs the Partnership to use information gathered through tracking and monitoring results to make revisions to the Action Agenda as needed.

How is the Partnership Organized?

There are four components to the Puget Sound Partnership’s structure: a seven-member Leadership Council appointed by the Governor, a 27-member Ecosystem Coordination Board convened by the Leadership Council, a nine-member Science Panel appointed by the Leadership Council to provide independent scientific advice, and an agency managed by an executive director appointed by the Governor.

Study Scope

This is the first of two JLARC audits of the Puget Sound Partnership. This first audit will review whether accountability measures are in place to assess progress in restoring the Puget Sound; the Partnership’s oversight of Action Agenda implementation; and a review of any applicable lessons learned from other large scale ecosystem based management efforts in other states. The second audit, due in 2016, will review environmental outcomes and progress in restoring the Puget Sound.

Study Objectives

This study will answer the following questions:

- (1) Are mechanisms in place to determine progress towards meeting Action Agenda objectives and scientific benchmarks? Are measures and results used to inform adaptive management of the Action Agenda?
- (2) What steps has the Partnership taken to address its oversight role? Has the Partnership met specific requirements in statute?
- (3) Does the Partnership's organizational structure and skill set reflect its current set of responsibilities?

This study will also review outcome data, if available, and include a review of other national ecosystem restoration efforts to inform these questions.

Timeframe for the Study

Staff will present the preliminary report at the October 2011 JLARC meeting and the final report at the November 2011 JLARC meeting.

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